



CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM PLANT GUIDE

BIG BLUEGRASS

Cultivars: Sherman, Service

Seed Size: 917,000 seeds/pound

Form: Bunchgrass, 16-20" tall,
Bluish-green leaves, dense
panicle seed head

Area of Adaptation: 'Sherman' big bluegrass is adapted to areas of the Inland Pacific Northwest that receive between 9 and 20 inches of annual precipitation. 'Sherman' originates from a native stand in Sherman Co., Oregon. It is also adapted to much of the Northern Rocky Mountains, Northern Great Plains, and Northern Great Basin. 'Sherman' grows on loamy sands to heavy clay loams, and tolerates moderately-acidic soils. 'Service' big bluegrass originates from Alaska, is adapted to the Coastal Pacific Northwest, and should not be planted east of the Cascade Mountains.

Seeding: Big bluegrass is small seeded and must be seeded no deeper than 1/2". A firm seedbed that allows for good seed to soil contact is necessary for good emergence. Seeding should be completed late in the fall or very early in the spring. It germinates readily at very cool temperatures and grows somewhat slowly after emergence.

Since big bluegrass is commonly seeded as a mixture with other grass species, adding rice hulls or vermiculite to the mix helps to ensure proper flow through the drill openings.

Broadcast seeding should be considered for fields that are either too loose to pack, or fields that will require overseeding with big sage. 'Sherman' and big sage are both very small seeded and could be seeded as a separate operation to the seeding of grasses that are seed 1/4-1/2" deep. Light harrowing can improve stand establishment. Harrowing immediately prior to broadcasting is generally superior to harrowing after broadcasting. Harrowing after seeding can result in deep seed burial.

Management & Uses: Big Bluegrass is an important native cool season grass. It is one of the first grasses to green-up in the spring and is palatable to all classes of livestock and wild ungulates. It is an excellent reseeder. In many CRP fields that were planted to crested wheatgrass + big bluegrass in the mid-1980s, the dominant species is now big bluegrass. It must be protected from grazing the first year because it is slow to develop a strong root system and can be easily pulled up the first year of planting.

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